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Pentagon Deputy Ousted in Dispute on Disclosure

By STEPHEN ENGELBERG
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, April 29 — The Defense Department has dismissed a senior official on the ground that he provided secret information for a news article on an American covert intelligence program, Government officials said today.

The officials said the department dismissed Michael E. Pillsbury, Assistant Under Secretary for policy planning. They said part of the evidence against Mr. Pillsbury was his failure to pass a polygraph, or lie-detector, test about published reports that Stinger missiles were being provided to the rebels in Angola and Afghanistan.

The dismissal comes at a time when members of the Congress have been accusing the Reagan Administration of a "lack of discipline" in handling secret information. It marks one of the rare instances in which an investigation of a disclosure to the news media has resulted in any action.

Robert Sims, the chief Pentagon spokesman, said today that the Pentagon would have no comment on the case because it involved a personnel matter. He said, however, "I can confirm that this is Dr. Pillsbury's last day here."

A Political Appointee

Other Government officials said that Mr. Pillsbury was given the polygraph test earlier this month and was told Monday that he would be dismissed. He is a political appointee, which means he can be dismissed without civil service proceedings.

Calls to Mr. Pillsbury's office in the Pentagon were not returned.

Mr. Pillsbury was an aide to Fred C. Iklé, the Under Secretary for policy. In his post he had access to detailed information about the Administration's covert paramilitary operations in Angola, Afghanistan and elsewhere.

It was not clear whether Mr. Pillsbury faced any further legal proceedings. The Administration has said on several occasions that it would consider bringing criminal action against people who made unauthorized disclosures of confidential information. Last year a Navy analyst, Samuel Loring Morison, was convicted on espionage charges after he was accused of selling a secret satellite photograph to a military publication. The conviction is being appealed.

Irritation Over Libya

Officials said that senior policymakers had become increasingly irritated by the appearance of information in the press about Libya and a large variety of the Administration's covert programs.

Earlier this month, this anger increased when it was disclosed that the rebels in Angola and Afghanistan would receive the American-made Stinger missile. The decision, a major change in policy, was made at the top levels of the Administration and was known to a relatively small number of people, according to Government officials familiar with the case.

The article was first printed by The Washington Post and a second article the next day, written by the columnists Rowland Evans and Robert Novak, included a detailed account saying that William J. Casey, the Director of Central Intelligence, had traveled to Africa to help arrange the covert operation to supply the Angolan insurgents.

The columnists reported that the missiles would be transported through Zaire, a disclosure that was damaging to the Administration's plans because the Government of Zaire had been nervous about playing a role in helping Jonas Savimbi, the Angolan rebel leader. There had been disclosures much earlier about similar shipments of aid through Zaire to Savimbi forces.

Dr. Pillsbury, a former analyst at the Rand Corporation, has twice before been dismissed from Government jobs. In 1978 he was dismissed from a job with the Senate Budget Committee after a trip to Japan in which he criticized Ambassador Mike Mansfield in conversations with Japanese officials. An embassy escort was present at the conversations.

Shortly afterward, the dismissal was the subject of an Evans and Novak column.

Mr. Pillsbury was also dismissed in 1981, when he was working as Acting Director of the Arms Control and Disarmament Agency at the State Department. The action came 10 days after an Evans and Novak column quoting a letter to Senator Jesse Helms, Republican of North Carolina, in which Mr. Pillsbury said he could not assure the Senator that conformance with treaties on limiting nuclear arms was verifiable.

In recent months members of Congress have repeatedly charged that the disclosures of sensitive information were coming from inside the executive branch.

Senator Patrick J. Leahy, a Vermont Democrat, who is chairman of the Select Committee on Intelligence, said in a speech: "I believe nearly all leaks of sensitive information come from the executive branch. This tendency to conduct policy debate or advance political interests through leaking classified information existed in the Ford and Carter Administrations. But in my nearly 12 years in Congress, I have never seen it on the scale practiced by Government officials under the present Administration."

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